DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 338 273 JC 910 477

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TITLE The Leadership Imperative for Mapping a Community College Strategy for Improving the Success of Minority Students.
PUB DATE 9 Jul 91
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the League for Innovation in the Community College "Leadership 2000" Conference (Chicago, IL, July 8-9, 1991).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Persistence; *Access to Education; Articulation (Education); *College Planning; *Community Colleges; Effective Schools Research; *Institutional Advancement; Leadership Responsibility; *Minority Groups; Models; *Student Recruitment; Two Year Colleges

ABSTRACT

The decision to launch a full-fledged and highly coordinated leadership strategy to enhance minority student success should be grounded in a clear definition and well-understood theoretical framework; a strategy for overall institutional advancement; and clearly defined structural relationships and accountability structures. Within this context, various leadership strategies can be implemented to bring about the institutional changes that will be required to increase minority student access and success. These strategies involve: (1) institutional advancement, which encompasses access, institutional commitment, opportunity and standards for student performance; (2) an orientation toward building educational bridges of learning and support services between high schools, two-year colleges, and four-year institutions; (3) a theoretical framework and evaluation model based on "effective schools" theory, emphasizing college mission, college-community relations, academic foundations, learning climate, strong and effective leadership, high expectations, and instructional assessment and feedback; and (4) clearly defined operational responsibilities for realizing the college's commitment to minority student success. The ultimate goal of the community college's Minority Student Success Strategy will be the increased effectiveness of the college's support program and services through the institutionalization of the objectives of programs defined within the strategy. (JMC)

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Presented
at
LEADERSHIP 2000 CONFERENCES
Conducted by the League for Innovation in the Community College and the University of Texas at Austin.

JULY 9, 1991

Chicago, Illinois

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THE LEADERSHIP IMPERATIVE FOR MAPPING A COMMUNITY COLLEGE STRATEGY FOR IMPROVING THE SUCCESS OF MINORITY STUDENTS

NOLEN M. ELLISON AND JANET D. SMITH*

INTRODUCTION

There is perhaps no greater challenge for minority leaders in higher education than improving the success of larger numbers of minority students. Minority groups in general, and blacks in particular, are rapidly losing participation ground in higher education. Minority students are more likely than other students to drop from the educational pipeline at every level. Minority students are more likely to leave secondary school before graduation, dramatically reducing the number of students qualified to apply for college admission. Minority graduates who do enter college are less likely to complete a degree. At every level of education, black students enroll in school or college at lower rates than white students. In 1982, only 58% of 18 to 19 year old youngsters in the black population of the United States were high school graduates, compared to 75% of whites in the same age group (American Council on Education, 1984). Between 1982 and 1990, the percentage of black high school graduates enrolling in college held steady at approximately 28%%. Additionally, blacks have lost ground relative to non-blacks at each stage of the educational ladder. In 1980, blacks represented 13.5% of all 18-19 year olds, 11.8% of all high school graduates, and 34.1% of all college freshmen. Four years later, only 5.9% of all bachelor degree recipients were black. By 1990, blacks represented only

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about 3% of all professional and doctoral recipients (American Council on Education, 1989).

Across the country, community colleges have responded to the challenge of educational access and opportunity for urban and minority students. The efforts of these colleges have resulted in measurable success, but the institutions also acknowledge that much of the challenge still remains to be met.

In attempting to help students overcome both personal and structural barriers to higher education, these institutions have focused primarily on strategies of inter-institutional articulation. This strategy seeks to smooth the transitions students must make from secondary schools to two-year, to four year schools. In these articulation efforts, the institutions have sought to effect change through curricular ladder improvements, academic and student support services, and student motivation through special recruitment and early enrollment programs.

But, many of these efforts have been sporadic at best. They have not been part of a leadership agenda that seeks to improve educational access, opportunity and success for students seeking associate and baccalaureate degrees. Each element of this effort must be designed to operate within the context of the community college's long range planning and institutional development framework.

The decision to launch a full-fledged and highly coordinated leadership strategy to enhance minority student success is grounded in some fundamental premises.

Theoretical Framework: A clear definition and well-understood theoretical framework (including expected outcomes and evaluation measures) must govern the development of efforts to effect both short and long term institutional change. To take full advantage of rapidly growing programs and resources related to improving the education of young people before and during post-secondary education, what is needed is a more effective theoretical framework that could provide the "map" for a college's longitudinal strategy for institutional change. The model must be clearly described for the college community since it offers a context for the college's coordinated efforts to facilitate high school to college transitions; improve student retention and academic achievement; and facilitate two-year to four-year college transfer. The effective schools theory, for example, contains many of the elements which may be used to define the conditions necessary to assure student success even at the college level. The theoretical "Model" for student access and success also provides an institutional framework for evaluations and analyses designed to assess the accomplishment of goals for both program outcomes and institutional change.

An Institutional Strategy: Consistent with its mission and philosophy, an institution must undertake change to improve minority student success in a way that is clearly understood and reflected as a strategy for overall institutional advancement. The success of the community college leader in achieving success for larger numbers of minority students is highly dependent on the clarity of the aggressive strategy for effective schooling in a large urban area which he or she chooses to define. The strategy must address the acknowledgment that, to ensure the success of large groups of minority students in two-year colleges, an institutional strategy that is clearly tied to a collegewide sense of purpose and priority is essential. The theoretical

model delineates a set of principles and the expected outcomes of the strategy. Along with the model, the institutional structure and operational responsibilities involved in such an undertaking must also be defined and broadly communicated as an important framework for program development and resource allocation planning.

Coordination: An effective minority access and success strategy requires that cooperative relationships be developed with urban high schools and four-year colleges and universities in the interest of students who will enter and exit at these levels of the educational continuum. As the "keeper of the strategy," the means for institution-wide leadership, coordination, evaluation, policy research and reporting, particularly as they relate to improvement of articulation and transfer opportunities must be clearly established. This may be defined as a "Center" for articulation initially, but its goal is not to exist as a self-contained unit, but rather one on which the entire college community may turn for assistance in building and maintaining articulation linkages. Executive leadership is an important key to institutional change. However, in the absence of singular line reporting relationships, clearly defined structural relationships and accountability structures are required.

The leadership strategies required for institutional change in order to increase minority student access and success are discussed here in the context of these premises.

LEADERSHIP FOR INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE THROUGH INSTITUTIONAL ADVANCEMENT

As has traditionally been the case in community colleges, approximately 39% of

minority students who attend post-secondary institutions (years 1-4) are enrolled in a two-year college. If community colleges are highly committed to the success of these students, such institutions can best do so because they offer high quality, accessible and affordable educational opportunities and services. They also offer university transfer, technical and lifelong learning programs designed to promote individual development.

To enhance the effectiveness with which the two-year college can accomplish its basic mission, it is essential that the institution undertake deliberate efforts to attract and retain larger numbers of minority students, and to provide opportunities which increase the likelihood of their educational success. The goals of institutional advancement through such a strategy must also be clearly agreed upon within the College. The leadership goals for the college may include, but not necessarily be limited to the following:

- The development of a cadre of well prepared students who enroll in the college's program and services;

- An increased number of students who graduate from urban high schools and continue on to higher education;

- A concrete demonstration of the college's commitment to improving the life preparation of youth in the urban community;

- Improvement of the overall teaching-learning environment and image of urban schools; and,

- Development and refinement of a model for improving urban schools which

may be applied to other higher education institutions.

In short, access, institutional commitment, opportunity and standards for student performance are important touchstones for developing and advancing the institution.

INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE THROUGH AN ORIENTATION TOWARD BUILDING EDUCATIONAL BRIDGES

The challenges which face urban schools are not unique to specific levels of education. Inadequate preparation in basic skills, high attrition rates, and economic hardships which detract from educational participation and academic performance -- all of these challenge the effectiveness of high schools, as well as two- and four-year colleges. Design of feasible career paths for students requires that bridge programs of learning and support services also be developed. Such programs must begin as soon as possible after students enter high school and must continue through the completion of their educational goals.

A two-plus-two-plus-two approach to curriculum ladders and individualized educational planning represents an important change in the professional orientation of staff at all levels of education. This should be supplemented by long term financial aid planning and strategic use of personal, academic and career support options. The development of such an orientation is particularly crucial in the two-year college environment.

The nature of cooperative planning which must be carried out between and among faculty, counselors, and administrators must come to be seen as an important and usual means of doing business at all three levels. Formal articulation

agreements, however detailed and specific their content, are dependent for their success on the bridges which serve to reduce discontinuity and disappointments as students move from one level of education to another.

LEADERSHIP FOR INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE THROUGH A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND EVALUATION MODEL

The purpose of any theory or framework is to establish a sense of order around which objectives for accomplishing relevant outcomes can be developed. Because institutional change to improve student success requires that coherence be created from seemingly disparate functions in structurally different areas, such a sense of order is particularly important. It provides the pegs on which to hang each activity and simultaneously describes the contribution of each objective. A theoretical framework also serves to define a set of institutional outcomes against which the implementation of plans can be evaluated. Decisions concerning program modification, resource allocation, and the placement of institutional responsibilities are also facilitated.

By way of illustration, "effective schools" theory provides a beginning framework around which to organize programmatic efforts to increase opportunities and improve the likelihood of educational success among minority students. Through extensive faculty and administrative discussions, program review and analysis and thorough review of the effective schools literature, this theoretical model could be easily modified and expanded to meet the needs of both high school and community college students. Much of the research, evaluation and writing on effective schools in the past has focused on student achievement at the elementary and middle school levels. Community colleges stand to provide national leadership in the application of this theory at the community college level.

In addition to presenting academic credibility, "effective school" theory is also sufficiently inclusive and adaptable to accommodate the broad range of objectives which are required to improve institutional effectiveness. The factors which have been shown to distinguish effective from ineffective schools, and which might be adapted as the theoretical framework for a Minority Student Access and Success Model are the following:

- A statement of college mission that is clearly defined, communicated to, and understood by its public as well as by its administrators, faculty and students.

- An emphasis on college-community relations (parents, businesses, civic organizations) that is required for cooperative planning, implementation and support of educational programs. This exemplifies and communicates to urban young people the mission and purpose of community colleges, the expectations of exemplary performance, the nature of faculty support that is available to assure such performance and the individual's responsibility for learning.

- An emphasis on academic foundations that is associated with students' ability to read, write, compute and process information with a minimum level of difficulty.

- A learning climate that cultivates respect and mutually trusting relationships among students, faculty, academic support staff and administrators in a manner that enhances student learning.

- Strong and effective leadership, particularly in the instructional and

student support domains. Such leadership confers with and advises faculty and community college students about learning outcomes and assures prompt solutions to enhance support for the college.

- High expectations are grounded on a belief that all students can achieve well beyond their current levels, and that student learning is a responsibility shared by both faculty and students. Faculty are expected to provide high quality instruction and to maintain high standards of learning. Students are expected to function at the highest motivational, perseverance and capability levels, and to accept personal responsibility for their performance.

- Continuous instructional assessment and feedback that are used to motivate students as well as to form the basis of corrective action. The objectives of instruction, along with the level of skills, knowledge and competencies which students are expected to learn must be clearly understood by each student.

The theoretical principles described above can be readily assessed in terms of their applicability to instructional and support programs jointly or separately designed and administered by the Community College as well as cooperating universities and urban high schools.

INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE THROUGH LEADERSHIP THAT CLEARLY DEFINES OPERATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

The leadership challenge in accomplishing the objectives of the institutional change model are identical to those which result in any changes in policies, procedures or practices within an institution. Such leadership must reflect a

clear understanding of the college's commitment to minority student success and the strategies by which it aims to operationalize this commitment. It must also understand the process of moving from strategy to implementation. Thus, the development of detailed plans, and the clear definition of operational leadership and responsibility are important factors.

While the change strategy is initiated as a key institutional priority for the leader, executive leadership for this operational program must rest with two key offices -- Institutional Planning and the college's Academic Vice President or Dean who has responsibility for program implementation. Operational staff with key responsibility for accomplishing the objectives of the strategy must be provided an opportunity to fully understand the strategy and theoretical framework for institutional change. They must be permitted to plan for the implementation of programs which contribute to the goals of the strategy; and to participate in the development of criteria and strategies to be used in evaluating program outcomes. Key faculty and administrative leaders must participate in planning meetings in which the premises, expectations, outcomes and theoretical model are fully discussed.

Open communication must also be maintained with, and presentations made to the broader college community on current or planned programs that are consistent with agreed-upon guidelines related to the mission, institutional goals, expectations, outcomes and (ultimately) student success of the Minority Student Success Strategy.

CONCLUSIONS

The community programs and services which seek to improve the access and

success of urban and minority students are designed, implemented and evaluated within the operational context of those units charged with ongoing responsibility for such functions. This ultimately assures that activities will be modified in such a manner as to continually effect changes designed to improve the success of minority students. This is the ultimate goal of the Community College's Minority Student Success Strategy -- the increased effectiveness of the college's support program and services through the institutionalization of the objectives of programs defined within the Strategy.

Through the success of the Strategy, the Community College leader can see to it that the college is prepared to address a range of major social and economic problems which face the urban community. Educated young adults are in a position to be productive citizens, community leaders, and effective and responsible parents. Thus, the ultimate outcomes of the college's commitment to the success of its urban and minority students will be the increased stability of the personal, economic and family lives of its neighbors and constituents.

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